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**Title:** Well-founded social fictions: a defence of the concepts of institutional and familial habitus

**Abstract:**

This article engages with Atkinson's (2011) recent criticisms of concepts of collective habitus, such as 'institutional' and 'familial' habitus, in order to defend their conceptual utility and theoretical coherence. In doing so we promote a flexible understanding of habitus as *both* an individual and a collective concept. By retaining this flexibility (which we argue is in keeping with the spirit of Bourdieuan philosophy) we allow for a consideration of the ways in which the individual habitus relates to the collective. We argue that, through recognition of the complexity of the interrelated habitus of individuals, collective notions go beyond individualist accounts that perceive only the relational aspects of the individual with the social field. Our approach allows us to consider sociological actors in relation to each other *and* as constitutive of fields rather than as mere individuals plotted in social space. These arguments will be woven through our responses to what Atkinson calls the three fatal flaws of institutional and familial habitus: namely, homogenisation, anthropomorphism, and substantialism.

**Introduction:**

Atkinson (2011) asserts that the concepts of 'institutional' and 'familial' habitus are theoretically unsound and in danger of throttling analysis. In this article we wish to defend these concepts and what we take to be the more general notion of 'collective habitus.' We consider these terms to be heuristic and socio-analytic tools concerned with the "impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organization" (Reay 1998, 521, referencing McDonough 1996) or institution, such as a family or a school. We argue that an individual's dispositions are mediated through an institution's organisational practices and collective forms of cooperation, and contra to Atkinson promote these understandings as both theoretically coherent and of conceptual utility.

Concepts of institutional and familial habitus have resulted from attempts to theorise the collective practices of groups of individuals rather than individuals per se.

Given the nature of habitus as the principle of production of practices that are “collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of the conductor” (Bourdieu 1990:53) it might appear that such collective conceptions of habitus are superfluous; its meaning already entailed in the individual habitus. However, we wish to highlight that an understanding of the individual habitus will be deepened by considerations of not only the social field but of the interconnections between habitus within this field (acknowledging homology in structuring influences). It is these kinds of practices that ideas of collective habitus seek to understand.<sup>1</sup> In particular the collective habitus draws on the social nature of subjectivity and herein lies its analytical strength.

Specific accounts of ‘collective habitus’ have been produced via the socio-analysis of coordinated practices that go some way to constituting the dispositional qualities of ‘institutions’, such as families and schools, which act both through and on individuals (for example see Reay (1998), Reay et al (2001) and Ingram (2009)). These institutions are a socially *realised* phenomena (Bourdieu 1996), a fact which Atkinson (2011) considers to contribute to his refutation of the social theoretical coherence of institutional and familial habitus. Based on the social realisation of the family, Atkinson’s understanding of such phenomena appears to be as fairly passive occurrences. However, formal institutions such as schools and education systems are also socially realised phenomena and, therefore, we might consider them as forms of ‘constructed social organisation’ (Coleman 1991), and highlight the degree to which positive, deliberate and active practices are required to maintain them. The socially realised fact of the family cannot be theoretically dismissed as mere ‘sociological fictions’. Rather, we require theoretical tools through which we might conceptualise how such institutions are collectively realised through the collectively coordinated practices that constitute them as well as the uncoordinated practices that are the more usual focus of Bourdieuan researchers. Realised social fictions are constituted by collective practices and, if we are to understand them sociologically they require

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<sup>1</sup> At this point we might draw attention to the way in which Bourdieu organized the Centre de Sociologie Européenne and his conscious organisation of sociological research as a collective and coordinated enterprise (Lenoir 2006), the case in point being *Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al 1999). Whilst it is reflexively essential that we recognise our own sociological habitus further recognition of the collective habitus of a research team, which is not merely the summation of its parts, may facilitate a deeper reflexive analysis of, say, Bourdieu’s Centre de Sociologie Européenne, the Chicago School and our own team based research practices.

investigation at the *median level*. They require us to exercise our sociological imaginations at the *median level*. Unlike research conducted at the macro level certain ‘complexities’ of the collectively practised social world cannot be ‘bracketed’ (Atkinson 2010: 10fn5). The kind of median level socio-analysis produced by those who engage with the concept of collective habitus reveals the complex interplay of not simply the individual in their socio-cultural location, not simply of habitus and field, but of the collective and interrelated practices of *multiple individuals* within a particular field.

Such a perspective promotes the idea that institutions have an *active* socio-cultural effect on the habitus of those within them. In other words, schools and other institutions can *directly* shape the habitus and practices of individuals through the organisational forms of the institution and the collective practice of those forms. Individually focused uses of habitus see such influences as essentially or solely mediated by the field. The idea of an institutional habitus introduces a degree of nuance to this mediation prompting us to consider not just the relational aspects of habitus and field but also the interactions of the different habitus within a given field. In this way it goes beyond understanding groups as an aggregate of individuals plotted in social space. Some more passive influences on habitus are merely the result of the position and trajectory of individuals within the social field. However other influences on habitus are more direct and involve individuals, or collective actors such as schools or families, actively shaping the habitus. Certainly this all takes place within specific fields or structured social spaces but, nevertheless, individual inter-relations and their consequences may be more or less direct.

At this point we should highlight that in what follows we continue to recognise the conceptual “gaps and rough edges” (Reay et al 2001, §8.4) of the collective habitus. Nevertheless our aim is to promote the utility of this as yet immature concept. Therefore, with Reay et al (2001), we appreciate the ongoing importance of putting the ‘institutional habitus’ to work in the context of research so that it might be further developed and fine-tuned. Our defence of the concept is an engagement with, rather than simply a rejection of, Atkinson’s critique. First we suggest Atkinson articulates a sophisticated, but orthodox, reading of Bourdieu. We argue that within Bourdieu’s program for sociology there is not only scope for

heterodoxy but there is also value, purpose, and a certain imperative to seek and develop alternative positions. This includes the derivation of alternative theoretical positions, particularly through the close socio-analysis of empirical data. We then address Atkinson's 'three fatal flaws' of collective habitus in turn and suggest the strength of his critique is overstated but, nevertheless, that we might learn from his views in order to develop a theoretically more robust account. In the conclusion we rearticulate collective habitus as a heterodox concept suitable for socio-analysis at the median level.

### **Atkinson's Socio-Philosophical Orthodoxy**

The use of social theory is a crucial element of sociological research and one that relates directly to the difference between lay and sociological, or social scientific, explanation and understanding. A 'sociological imagination' (Mills 1959) is one which makes use of the conceptual tools provided by social theory and can produce a critical understanding of the relations between individuals and society, between structure and agency. However, the sociologist is unavoidably both a lay and a professional social actor as any attempt to scientifically study the social world also involves being part of the social world. As lay social actors we have been socialised to accept certain norms and have a 'common sense' understanding of social practices and relations.<sup>2</sup> In order to understand the social world socio-logically<sup>3</sup> we must be prepared to break from our 'common sense' understanding and imagine anew. This is not a new idea; Durkheim similarly advised that "one must systematically discard all preconceptions" (1895/1982, 72). An idea Bourdieu has further elaborated (Bourdieu et al. 1991). We must, therefore, be prepared to accomplish an 'epistemological break' with common sense or 'lay understanding'. This can be achieved, at least in part, through the use and exploration of social theory.

If, as Bourdieu consistently advised, we turn our own tools against ourselves then we can imagine that, as an established practice within a durable and highly structured social field, sociology may find itself propagating a second form of 'common sense'. To reach any position within the academy is to be trained within the

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<sup>2</sup> On a relevant exploration of Bourdieu and lay/ professional common-sense see Holton (1997).

<sup>3</sup> At this point we draw the readers attention to our comments, below, regarding the 'fuzzy logic' of society and the implications this has for sociology.

academy and so the internalisation of knowledge and experience of social theory and its uses is inevitable. Understood as an example of professional reproduction it is plausible that academic training may lead to the unreflexive acceptance of certain pre-conceptions, including theoretical or meta-sociological pre-conceptions. In this vein Bourdieu (1992, 248-253) discusses the 'double bind' of research. He explains that the theoretical tools researchers use to break with common sense may come to replace 'lay' common sense with one of a more academic or learned character. If we acknowledge the possibility of a *learned common sense* then, in the course of research or a research career, we should remain attuned to the potential need for a second epistemological break. We might deepen this perspective and go beyond what we might call the disciplinary common sense of sociology, or anthropology or philosophy and so forth, and consider that certain research programs or sub-disciplinary approaches to research may acquire their own orthodoxies and their own learned common sense, with regards to what they do and how their objects are to be understood.

Bourdieuian sociologists can find opportunity for a second epistemological break through their engagement with empirical data. Throughout his career Bourdieu was concerned to promote a contextual understanding of theory, i.e. one in which theory is not sundered from data (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 26-35). Bourdieu considers there to be a partnership between social theory and socio-analysis through which we can both generate and develop sociological knowledge. In this frame empirical research becomes more than the methodological application of technique or method. Rather it is an active and, at times, forceful aspect of research. Wacquant explains that, for Bourdieu, the relationship between social theory and empirical practices should not be understood as being one of simple mutual benefit or of interdependence but, rather, as 'interpenetrative' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 34-35). The interpenetrative relationship of social theory and empirical data can be used to create something entirely new.<sup>4</sup> However, in Atkinson's hands, there does not appear to be any great scope for the development of conceptual tools through their use in empirical research contexts. Rather, and perhaps unintentionally, his work succeeds

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of how sociological practices can realise this interpenetrative relationship see Burke (2011).

in presenting itself as a singular and orthodox exegesis of Bourdieuan social theory ready for application to empirical data.

Consider, for example, Atkinson's 'Phenomenological Additions to the Bourdieusian Toolbox' (2010). One could understand the undeniably excellent, informative, subtle and nuanced positions advanced in this work to be self-consciously articulating a phenomenological, but nevertheless orthodox, interpretation of Bourdieu. Atkinson presents himself as 'mining' the phenomenological texts of Schutz and, to a lesser extent, Husserl in order to uncover, rather than articulate; discover, rather than develop, some hitherto unaddressed but, we are to understand, implicit aspects of Bourdieu's social theory. In so doing Atkinson appears to present a genealogical excavation of Bourdieu's acknowledged intellectual antecedents in order to produce what Bourdieu perhaps neglected in favour of pursuing other concerns and lines of enquiry.<sup>5</sup> Consider Atkinson's claim that "both [Schutz] and Bourdieu share the intellectual heritage bequeathed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty" (2010: 16). We think that in attempting to avoid "synthesis of . . . sociological and philosophical traditions decisively wrenched out of their context" ((Bourdieu and Waquant 2001: 5) cited by Atkinson (2010: 16)), by seeking the common antecedent intellectual context of Bourdieu and Schutz he should do so by embracing *his own* intellectual context in which they are rendered compatible. He could then openly acknowledge that his attempt to develop Bourdieuan social theory through a use of Schutz' phenomenology, in the broader context of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, is the result of *his own* on going intellectual trajectory rather than merely the result of *their* past trajectories. In so doing he can take direct reflexive responsibility and reap the intellectual respect that rightly obtains to his sophisticated theoretical labours.

Atkinson (2011, 344) defends his 'orthodoxic' position by commenting that, while empirical research is important for extending theory, it has limits. He argues that empirical discovery must be accompanied by 'logical vigilance'. However, we might draw a distinction between the logical vigilance required to build and maintain the 'master' social theory and the general model of society it constructs, and that required by the discursive process that occurs between the conceptual aspects of a

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<sup>5</sup> Of course we understand the (variable) conventional pressures on the presentation, style and format on one's written work if it is to be considered a 'research article' and suitable for publication in an academic fora.

social theory and the empirical world in the context of a socio-analysis. If, as it appears, that Atkinson is preoccupied with remaining faithful to a text then it is understandable that, in general terms, his perspective produces a prescriptive reading of Bourdieu's social theory as a master theory which, in turn, conditions a relatively inflexible model of society. Nevertheless it might be countered that Atkinson (2010) has committed to the idea of a conceptual toolbox and that there is little to divide the construction of general models of society from more specific models in the light of a particular socio-analysis of empirical data.

However, we suggest that Atkinson's rejection of collective habitus as a social and sociological fiction is based on the fact that he is using those tools in an attempt to build a general, possibly realist, model of reality. We do not go so far as to suggest he is mistaking his model of reality for the reality of that model (Bourdieu 1977, 29) but, nevertheless, it is evident that there is no place for the concept of collective habitus within his model. The collective habitus should be understood as forming part of a different kind of model than the one produced by Atkinson. This model seeks to be instructive, flexible and dynamic and one through which knowledge, and critiques, of 'reality' can be purposively developed. We think that Atkinson has used his tools to fashion a model akin to the way an architect might do so when developing blueprints or, perhaps, akin to the way Michelangelo suggested he 'freed', rather than produced, David from the marble. In contrast building models with the tool of collective habitus is a more abstract affair and more akin to modernist than classical art, more impressionist than fully representational. In our analysis, as symbolic productions, sociological models necessarily bear the marks of the tools used to produce them; they bear the marks of "the social conditions of their own production" (Bourdieu 1992, 139).<sup>6</sup> Such models should, therefore, recognise their own limitations and remain dialogically open to the criticisms offered by other perspectives.

Whilst we consider Atkinson's work to display a sophisticated appreciation for highly complicated arguments and to usefully develop a phenomenological account of Bourdieu's perspective it nevertheless promotes an understanding of Bourdieuan social theory born of what we call 'academic common sense'. Whilst Atkinson's exegesis fulfils the letter of Bourdieuan social theory it does not fulfil the

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<sup>6</sup> Tools, sociological or otherwise, are of course social phenomena.



spirit of a fully Bourdieuan sociological program. We might also suggest that there is a lack of reflexive engagement with one's own academic socio-cultural location and intellectual trajectory. At the most basic level we could point to the fact that as an early career researcher the logic of Atkinson's (and our own) position within the field of UK Bourdieuan sociology is to establish one's intellectual credentials in a manner that is at once orthodox and heterodox, that at once establishes his (and our) academic credentials and belonging as well as his (and our) difference and distinction. The remainder of this essay attempts to show the merit in considering Atkinson's critique an exercise in theoretical orthodoxy over that of a sociological heterodoxy. In so doing we acknowledge that one consequence is, unavoidably, the articulation of our own distinction (and belonging) and that this should be appreciated when evaluating our theoretical positions. The specificities of its formation are inseparable from this context. Nevertheless our avowed purpose - the support of the concept of collective habitus - can, in the hands of others and in the context of empirical research, go beyond our own particular articulation. We hope others will be inclined to adopt, rearticulate and develop the concept of collective habitus for their own purposes.

### **Responding to the 'Three Fatal Flaws' of Collective Habitus:**

The substantive thrust of Atkinson's critique of collective habitus is built around what he terms its three fatal flaws (2011). In this section we take each in turn, although in reverse order, and attempt to address, rather than merely reject, his concerns.

#### *Homogenisation:*

The criticism Atkinson considers to be "most significant" (2011: 339) is that conceptions of collective habitus act to homogenise individuals. In particular he suggests that "by rolling all members of the family, school or university in together as one monolithic unit, [collective habitus] completely steamrolls any internal heterogeneity or dissension" (338). However, as with conceptions of class habitus, using the concept does not necessarily entail considering all the individuals that fall within its remit to share an identical habitus, and does not entail considering individuals within a group to have a single habitus between them. Instead, as an institution is realised through its various practices, i.e. through the various collective and individual practices of its members, it is obvious that there must be variation

across individual habitus. The constitutive practices of members may, at times, resist or challenge the institution and refuse to conform to the dispositional arrangements within it. Nevertheless, the central analytic focus must be on ‘conformity,’ ‘agreement’ and ‘cooperation’ of individuals with the shared practices of the collective as it is through these activities that the institution is maintained.

This view is borne out by the idea that those who tend not to conform to institutional practices, such as maverick teachers or students from different educational cultures, may find their membership of the group difficult to maintain (see for example Ingram 2011). As such whilst there is a generalisation inherent in the construction of collective habitus that, as with accounts of class habitus, is ‘homogenising’ we are not committed to the suppression of dissent or the denial of difference in producing such accounts. Rather such accounts are a starting place for enquiry into such matters. It is only through the articulation of collective orthodoxy, with a concomitant examination of doxa, that an adequate examination and socio-analysis of heterodoxy can be achieved. With regard to institutions such an enquiry can occur into internal or external relations. Such enquiries can be either conducted *within* particular institutions or *between* comparable institutions. Thus, in short, we see scope in the theorisation of collective habitus to be used to comprehend practical, and not simply structural, differences *within* and *between* institutions of a particular analytic kind or methodological type.

Bourdieu argues that “practice has a logic that is not that of the logician” (Bourdieu 1990: 86) and cautions against theoretical reductionism which substitutes the “system of products [the actors within an institution] for the system of principle of production [the institution as a social field]” (Bourdieu 1990: 86). By considering practices reducible to the individual’s system of principles of production Atkinson shuts down a theoretical understanding of what Bourdieu termed its necessary “irregularities and even incoherencies” (Bourdieu 1990: 86) or “the fuzzy coherence that cannot withstand the test of logical criticism” (Bourdieu 1990: 87). He shuts down an understanding of everyday social life in which institutions and families are realised social fictions. If we are to consider any group and its practices then a degree of affinity between members (which might be seen as a fuzzy form of homogeneity) must be assumed in order that we might understand how the group functions and is

maintained through shared experiences and practices as well as through struggle and resistance. What is common to, and shared by, a collective is important in understanding individual members. It is important to avoid simplistically conceptualising a group as the mere aggregate of the isolated individuals that comprise it, despite the latter having a logical appeal born of Occam's Razor i.e. a desire for the socio-philosophical elegance of ontological conservatism or 'simplicity'. The term institutional habitus works not only with notions of the individual but also with notions of affinity and homology that exist between individuals within collectives. Therefore it can be used to mobilize the concept of habitus in a theoretically coherent way and to understand the habitus of actors within an institution as *members* and not merely individuals.

#### *Anthropomorphism:*

In regards habitus Atkinson appears to require any ontological commitment to be premised on the 'brute', rather than 'social', fact (Searle 1996) of the individual. He argues that habitus is a "necessarily *corporeal* or, to put it in broader terms, *organic*" (Atkinson 2011: 337) substance. He goes further and claims it is "rooted in the dense mesh of neural networks formed through the strengthening and weakening of synaptic connections through experience" (Atkinson 2011: 337). However, the habitus is not itself corporeal. It is not a substantial organic property but a social theoretical concept that theorises the incorporation of the social into the corporeal (McNay 1999). Despite his subsequent commitment to phenomenological intentionality we consider Atkinson to be in danger of inviting a reductive reading of Bourdieuan social theory, and of sociology more generally. At best his view appears to reinstate the dichotomy between individual (agency) and society (structure) albeit into what we might term the restrictive legitimacy of clearly delineated 'micro' and 'macro' forms of sociology (Atkinson 2010: 10 & fn5). However it is not the semi-realist reading of habitus into the organic individual per se that we find problematic but, rather, Atkinson's apparent restriction of habitus to this, and only this, reading. The difficulty we have can be most clearly seen in his suggestion that conceptions of collective habitus commit the sin of anthropomorphism.

The first thing to note is that to anthropomorphise something is to impute to it human qualities that it cannot and does not possess. However, as a matter of social

fact, institutions are often ‘anthropomorphised’ - for example, companies are incorporated as legal persons and Uncle Sam is considered to be America. In so doing we often attribute ‘mind’ to groups,<sup>7</sup> a fact which cannot be ignored at a philosophical, particularly moral (See: May & Tuomela 2007 and remainder of this special issue), or social theoretical level. Social institutions are constituted by individuals and it is the members of institutions and their collective practices that are the analytic focus of the collective habitus. The usual target of a complaint of anthropomorphism is the reading of human or human like emotional responses into the object concerned, be it an animal, a robot or an institution. Certainly the institution does not itself have an emotional life but, nevertheless, we might suppose that members of an institution have human emotions, both as members of the institution and as part of their institutional or collective habitus. Thus the anthropomorphic critique has only a degree of its usual power as whilst institutions are not biologically or phenomenologically integrated in the same way as individuals neither are they entirely devoid of any such human qualities. Thus rather than considering the application of habitus to collectives an illegitimate *anthropomorphism* we consider it to be an entirely legitimate *animation* of, in this instance, the collectively engaged practices through which institutions are constituted.

Bourdieu (1977, 1990) argues that individuals are able to receive and share in the history objectified in institutions. Individual agents accomplish this through habitus adjustments in order to “appropriate them [i.e. institutions] practically” (Bourdieu 1990: 57). While Bourdieu himself does not use the term institutional habitus, the phrase is useful when considering the incorporation of the institution into the habitus. An institution can bring about an adjustment in the habitus of individuals within it through its collective actions (or the actions of those within it). This tends to bring agents into a state of habitus homology. It is these homologies, these shared habitus engendered by the institution, that underpins the notion of institutional habitus. As Bourdieu argues:

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Waytz & Young (2011). However we fear their analysis, and their research participants more generally, fail to sufficiently “distinguish between the powers and tendencies of social entities and those of individuals” (Nash 2008, 54) as they appear, somewhat simplistically, to think that the metaphorical ‘mind’ of the group in some sense substitutes for that of the individual.

“In short, being the product of a particular class of objective regularities, the habitus tends to generate all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common-sense’, behaviors (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are positively adjusted to the logic of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate” (Bourdieu 1990: 55-56).

It is within the institutional field that positively sanctioned, common-sense behaviours are generated. These denote common forms of habitus, what we would term institutional habitus, and are forms of individual habitus collectively adjusted to the logic of the field.

In Bourdieuan terms the institution can be considered as a field and so, Atkinson (2011) argues, cannot have habitus. However, thinking of institutional habitus as those shared or coordinated components of individuals’ habitus that are inculcated by a particular institution does not preclude thinking of the institution as a field – in fact, it entails it. The term institutional habitus is useful in considering the internalisation of the structures of the school field, and in particular how this internalisation is not only common to those within the institution but also results from institutional activities. To quote Bourdieu once again:

“The habitus is what enables the institution to attain full realization: it is through the capacity for incorporation, which exploits the body’s readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social, that the king, the banker or the priest are hereditary monarchy, financial capitalism or the Church made flesh” (Bourdieu 1990: 57).

Whilst the rhetoric makes use of certain focal points we might also point to the way in which pupils, particularly when in uniform, are the school made flesh whilst children more generally are literally and metaphorically the family made flesh. It would be misguided to think the king, the banker, the priest, the pupil, or the child are the entirety of the hereditary monarchy, financial capitalism, the church, the school, or the family. However it would appear that herein lies Atkinson’s error.

Bourdieu highlights that while institutions are not supernatural entities they may gain ‘dispositional’ power through key figures within them and especially

through the actions or performances of key figures in their roles as shaped by the institution. Through this “performative magic of the social” (Bourdieu 1990: 57) it is almost as if the actors become the institution. The attribution of human-qualities to non human institutions is successful in conjuring the idea that the institution can powerfully shape those within it and generate practices which conform to institutionally recognised actions, regardless of the individual’s prior habitus. It is important for sociology to explain, rather than to explain away, social fictions (or social constructions) such as institutions. To consider the institution as dispositional is to work with the collective recognition of institutional expectations and provide an opportunity for complex socio-analysis rather than simply ‘throttling’ it at birth through accusations of anthropomorphism. Furthermore, for Bourdieu, the institution is capable of living through individuals.

“An institution ... is complete and fully viable only if it is durably objectified not only in things, that is, in the logic, transcending individual agents, of a particular field, but also in bodies, in durable dispositions to recognise and comply with demands immanent in the field” (Bourdieu 1990: 58).

The word “viable” is adopted from Bourdieu’s native French where it means “capable of life”. In English it is more commonly understood to mean “capable of becoming actual”. The meaning is subtly, yet significantly, different, indicating that Bourdieu may have conceived institutions to metaphorically ‘have a life of their own’. Thus we consider imputing habitus to social fictions to *animate*, rather than *anthropomorphise*, what is, we must recall, not only a *model of reality* (Bourdieu 1990: 39) but a model of *social reality*. Indeed one could consider Bourdieu’s habitus to be the principle which animates what would otherwise be a structural, and therefore determinist, social theory or ‘model’. Furthermore, if we consider it to be the case that we are in need of a principle of freedom at the median level, i.e. at the level of the collective, and not just at the level of individual action, and think, as Bourdieu does, “that the habitus offers the only durable form of freedom” (Bourdieu 1999: 340) then it is precisely in the power of habitus to sociologically and metaphorically animate the individual, the collective, the social theory, and our models of reality that its virtue is

to be found.<sup>8</sup> The logic of the institution transcends the habitus of individual agents and simultaneously transcribes itself on those same individuals. In so doing it renders the concept of institutional habitus a theoretically coherent and a useful addition to the Bourdieuan tool box.

*Substantialism (or Non-relationalism):*

We must profess ourselves a little confused by what Atkinson means to convey by the term ‘substantialism’. The substantive critique he levels under this heading appears to be that any conceptual articulation of collective habitus cannot have the required relationalism, i.e. he cannot perceive the collective habitus as inseparable from the social field to which it relates. This latter critique makes sense to us. Any account of collective habitus must be a relational one and below we demonstrate how institutional and familial habitus can be construed to meet this criterion. However the sin of ‘substantialism’ seems to imply that if socially realised collectives, such as family and schools, are imbued with habitus then the social theorist must be committed to the view that they are ontologically substantial or are ‘brute’ facts. This ‘flaw’ is akin to, or perhaps at root of, the anthropomorphic claim.

As such substantialism seems wedded to the biological - organic and corporeal - individual.<sup>9</sup> However, as Lahire has shown, the individual is, in important respects, a socially realised fiction (Lahire 2010: 16). For example, like companies, individuals

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<sup>8</sup> If the reader encounters resistance when thinking of habitus as having a metaphorical nature, as implied by our suggestion that it animates Bourdieu’s social theory, we would advise reflection on the metaphor of ‘the field’ (or ‘social space’) and, indeed, the various forms of capital. If one accepts that the habitus is conceptually intertwined with the field and that the field is essentially a metaphorical concept then the habitus cannot but have an element of metaphor about it. We do not wish to imply that an interdisciplinary account of habitus that moved away from its basic metaphorical nature could not be given by, for example, psychology, cultural psychology or, perhaps better, cognitive anthropology merely that, if they are to remain ‘Bourdieuian,’ such accounts cannot fully escape the relationalism of habitus with field.

<sup>9</sup> At this point we leave the question of whether the ‘life-support’ or ‘ecology’ required by habitus requires the brute fact of a biological or psychological individual. As critiques of habitus show, many appear to be tempted to adopt this line. We would, however, note that if the habitus is indeed a “psychological black box” (Boudon 1998:175) there is no question of the sociologist fully meeting the charge, only the possibility of an interdisciplinary response. The habitus cannot merely be, as Bloch suggests it is, “a kind of private psychology for the use of social scientists” (2005 11). Although we are unsure if Atkinson is in fact proposing the biological or psychological individual as the necessary ground of habitus, if he is he must face these charges and the difficulties they bring. If, as we suspect, Atkinson (2010) considers the phenomenological life world to be the ground of habitus then we would, at this point, simply note that his account has yet to demonstrate an appreciation for intersubjectivity and so of the class of collective activity that concerns us here. Intersubjectivity is an important part of lived experience and of Schutz’ phenomenology which features heavily in Atkinson’s published views.

are also legally incorporated persons. Bourdieu considers these realised social fictions to be ‘well-founded’ (Bourdieu 1996: 20) and suggests that “[i]t can be said without contradiction both that social realities are social fictions with no other basis than social construction, and that they really exist, inasmuch as they are collectively recognised” (1996: 20) to which we might add collectively enacted and practiced. Elsewhere Bourdieu suggests “[t]he socialized body (what is called the individual or the person) is not opposed to society: it is one of its forms of existence” (Bourdieu 1993: 15). We therefore consider it more likely that sociology, and sociological terms such as habitus, are predominantly concerned with the social embodiment of individuals rather than simply with the body of the biological individual. Furthermore, the individual may also be the site of multiple or plural habitus (Lahire 2010). If an individual’s habitus can be sub-divided or, more accurately, if various of their field relative dispositions can be grouped in order to identify multiple forms of habitus within an individual - mother and head teacher, say - then, whilst bearing in mind the brute fact of the biological individual, we might recognise the ‘fact’ of an individuals multiple habitus are essentially social or ‘institutional’ and *realised*.<sup>10</sup> We might also recognise that these ‘sociological facts,’ i.e. the sociologically realised fiction of an individual’s habitus and their associated practices, are not fully independent from the habitus and practices of others but, rather, are interdependent with them.

In, what Nash calls “a further eclectic extension of the reference of ‘social structure’ Bourdieu includes all those properties of social systems Durkheim called *social facts*” (Nash 2008, 47). As a socially realised fact the family is not merely an objective or objectivised structure of society but a normative structure embedded within society’s values and cultural norms. In this view the family is an aspect of the field. However as “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1977, 72) habitus is not fully distinct from the field. The structures of the field are embodied within individual and collective habitus and what is embodied within individual and collective habitus structures the field. Bourdieuan social structures are to be understood as thicker concepts than might normally be the case within sociology. Bourdieuan sociology is, potentially at least, more *anthropological* in the depth of its empirical focus on the specificities of the social

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<sup>10</sup> Of course certain facts about biological individuals might not be merely or simply ‘brute’ facts but also intertwined with social facts. The discourse around sex and gender is the most obvious complex example.



and cultural field. Collective habitus seeks to work with groups, specific and interrelated individuals, and the generalised social structures within which interrelated individuals are constituted and are constitutive of. Thus, ‘mother,’ ‘father’ or ‘parent’ is not merely a position within social space but also a disposition within habitus. Furthermore particular fathers (from which the cultural idea of ‘the father’ is abstracted, or objectivised, and so accorded its structuring and normative power to restructure particular fathers) stand not only in relation to mothers and to children but are interrelated with specific mothers and children. The specificities of a particular family, the location, relations and dispositions within them are mutually constitutive. It is here that the analytic idea of collective familial habitus finds purchase and, therefore, when constructing an account of ‘collective habitus’ one attends to the interdependent and interrelated habitus of members and draws them into a *median* level socio-analysis. Here we can consider the values and norms, the Durkheimian social facts co-opted by Bourdieu into social structures, which bind together specific families, schools and social institutions into coherent units. Here we can consider the way in which individuals’ habitus are not merely related or positioned but interrelated and so mutually, which is to say collectively, dispositioned.

If we move beyond the somewhat misleading issue of substantialism and consider Atkinson’s charge that the collective habitus necessarily contravenes the “ontology upon which the notion of habitus is founded: relationalism” (Atkinson 2011: 336) then we can appreciate the degree to which this claim is also misguided. The collective habitus does not deny the necessary relationship between habitus and field rather it points towards another aspect of this relational ontology; the relationalism of one habitus to another. This makes clear our view that an individual’s habitus does not merely stand in relation to the field but also to the habitus of others. Furthermore, any habitus is developed within a given social group. It develops in relation to – and is partially shared by – those who share similar social conditions and trajectories. It is reasonable to suppose that a group habitus can be generated or, more accurately, that groups of people (students or siblings say) can, in concord with, and in relation to one another, develop a common form or aspect of habitus as a result of this relation. This does not imply some kind of substantial ‘super-habitus’, as suggested by Atkinson (2011: 337); rather it emphasises the inter-relational nature of

our practices, as well the social formation and development of habitus.<sup>11</sup> In this way we can acknowledge the interrelated development of divergent individual habitus; one such example is the homologous relationship between the students' institutional habitus and that of the newly qualified teacher taking the class.

Being overly focused on the way habitus can be used to explain a myriad of individual experiences and practices Atkinson does not appreciate its collective formation i.e. the ways in which individuals within groups can develop individualised forms of both similar and differing, but nevertheless interrelated, habitus. At worst Atkinson's conceptualisation of institutional habitus would deny the variable connections between individuals within social space, at best it simply under-emphasises them through a sole focus on the field. Either way there is a serious loss of power to Bourdieuan social theory as, arguably, it is precisely the way in which habitus connects individuals and their experiences within groups as both individuals and group members (and within which their habitus is generated) that gives habitus its explanatory power.

It is important, therefore, to conceive of how it is that the group or collective habitus becomes imposed and embodied within the individual. Bourdieu works with both individual (field relational) and collective (field and other relational) notions of habitus. For example he argues that habitus, as a set of dispositions acquired by social conditions, "may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions" (Bourdieu 2002: 29). More powerfully, he argues, in accordance with our conceptualisations of collective habitus that:

"Because the social is also instituted in biological individuals, there is, in each biological individual, something of the collective, and therefore properties valid for a whole class of agents. ... Habitus understood as an individual or a socialized biological body, or as the social, biologically individuated through incarnation in a body, is collective, or transindividual – and so it is possible to construct classes of habitus, which can be statistically characterized" (Bourdieu 2000: 156-157).

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<sup>11</sup> Here we might note Sfard's view that development does "not mean a transformation in people but rather in forms of human doing" (2010 80) i.e. in forms of practice.

To focus solely on the individual without recourse to discussion of social groups limits the concept of habitus as a sociological tool as, to do so, is to fail to fully encapsulate the range of social influences on the formation of an individual's habitus. Atkinson's denial of the possibility of the collective habitus threatens to undermine complex understandings of the relations between the individual, individuals and society. This neglect of complexity is clearly at odds with Bourdieu's own work when he argues that "in short, the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Acknowledging the ways in which the development of habitus and the practices habitus produce are interrelated is essential if we are to acknowledge the complexity of our society and cultures. The only way to do this is through a relationalism that appreciates the individual as related to others as well as to the field.

### **Conclusion:**

In our differing views of the collective habitus we think that we have an example of the tussle between two uses of social theory and the models of (social) reality they produce. In the first, Atkinson's, we have an attempt to get at 'the truth of the matter'; to create a model of reality that, as closely as possible, *represents* reality constituted by individuals plotted in social space. On the other hand we have models of reality with a different purpose. These models are attempts to 'think differently' and uncover aspects of 'reality' that have, hitherto, remained uncovered, unthought, untheorised and unrealised. As an aspect of a theory or model of social reality, and therefore as an orthodox model of society, Bourdieu's habitus is correctly considered the property of organic, corporeal and embodied individuals. However as an aspect of the Bourdieuan toolbox for socio-analysis which can be used to *construct* analytic and sociological perspectives on habitus, such as the class habitus, it can be considered as the property of classes of individuals and collectives or groups of individuals. As an analytical construct the collective habitus has no substantial grounds, no brute, ontological or metaphysical reality; and it has no need of such grounds. It is not an actualisation but rather a generalisation and regularisation: a social and sociological realisation.

As a concept suitable for median level socio-analysis the collective habitus is to be found within the interrelations (not just the relations) of the habitus of individuals as well as the ‘institutional’ social space within which they are related. In Atkinson’s account there does not appear to be any space for such a median level sociology. We consider such sociology essential to understanding the interactions between individuals, and between individuals, groups and institutions within the wider sociological landscapes of modern society. What Atkinson calls the baggy and anthropomorphic aspects of collective habitus we consider to be its flexibility and dynamism: it is flexible enough that we might simultaneously consider both individual and collective forms of habitus; it is dynamic enough to engage the idea that habitus is formed and re-formed within social space.

If we take Atkinson’s argument to mean that the concept of collective habitus has no place within the brute, rather than social, ontology of a fully metaphysical grand theory of society then he is correct. However if we think of the concept of collective habitus as a socio-analytical tool of the Bourdieuan researcher in their dynamic, flexible and critical engagement with empirical data then its value cannot be missed. It lies precisely in the way in which we act together and can be held socially, morally, and ethically responsibly for doing so. With Nash we recognise that “it is crucial to distinguish between the powers and tendencies of social entities and those of individuals” (Nash 2008, 54). But this is to acknowledge that social entities have powers, tendencies and dispositions. If we abandon the idea of collective habitus, and fail to recognise the need for a median level sociology more generally, then we abandon a critical, in both sense of the term, line of socio-political enquiry in the interests of grand theoretical rigour: something which Bourdieu would obviously not be prepared to do.

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